

Vital Importance of Hygiene

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must be a Christian. The former aims at a sound and healthy body no less than the Christian, but it has additional or different motives. The aim of a Christian hygiene is to train the body to health and strength, chiefly for the labors and duties and responsibilities of life, not merely to increase its capacity for enjoyment. The children are soon to be the parents of the land, not merely the laborers. They will need strong bodies to produce fine children, to support and educate them, to withstand the immense sorrows of parenthood, to overcome the fearful temptations forced upon them by the horrible immorality of this hour. The pagan hygiene prattles about training the children for duties and responsibilities, but it really means to increase their capacity for pleasure, to show them how to evade certain duties and responsibilities and to escape the penalties attached to the evasion. What else is the yelled hygiene of the popular publications? What other explanation of the insane enthusiasm, private and printed, in behalf of the crimes called race suicide, birth control and prophylactic measures?

It may safely be said that the pagan character of modern hygiene has forced a Christian hygiene into existence as a measure of self-defence. Sir Francis Galton may lay claim to the honor of forcing the Christians into line on this matter. His efforts to apply stock farm methods to the procreation of mankind, at least by its terrible irony, aroused the Christian thinkers. It was self-defence and pity too that forced the American schools to clean up the children of the immigrants, and this process will have to go on until the last child is fixed in habits of cleanliness. But if this had never acted compassion would have taken its place, intelligent compassion, which carries interest much further than handing a beggar his daily fee. What a poor teacher he would be who could drill his class for years in the daily schedule and take no further interest in them! It happens that in this world there are several thousand such teachers, intelligent, conscientious, industrious, but who draw the line at the duty paid for per hour and wiffully remain blind to the good which they might do. It is so easy for the teacher to note the deficiencies of the little ones and to interest them in their removal.

The lower sort of immigrant's children are a robust lot, but full of little defects and troubles, connected with the eyes and ears, the nose and mouth and the shape of the body or its carriage. These matters are noticeable to the teacher, who has to take but little trouble in order to have them removed. The poor are so accustomed to hardship that deficient sight in one eye, poor hearing, adenoids, decaying teeth, crooked limbs, irregular shoulders and the like hardly get their attention, being bearable troubles. An insistent inquiry from the teacher about them would result in their speedy removal. Harsh speaking and singing voices belong to some children, owing to conditions at home. Many have peculiar habits in walking, sitting, standing, moving about, speaking. An occasional admonition from the teacher if regularly delivered will bring about a change for the better. The elaborate system of the State school with its costly and complete apparatus should have perfect results, but the church school through its devoted and industrious teachers should secure good results among the immigrant's children even without a thorough system and fine apparatus.

We are now told by the experts that the nervous strain of American life is apparent in the unnatural increase of heart and kidney diseases among the more comfortable citizens. It is certainly apparent in the native children, who cannot compare in ro-

bustness and nerve power with their parents and grandparents. Our hideous industrialism is beginning to show consequences. Hygienic study is therefore a prime necessity of the hour for the Americans as well as for the immigrants. Self-defence is a law of nature. The children need to be taught in the schools the whole value of that one asset of the poor, a healthy body. The value of knowledge, of study, of time, of money, of virtue and religion, of industry, is a common topic of the parent for the child. Why should not health have its place in the discussion? It is assaulted by the interests as frequently as virtue and honesty. If the child is to be put upon his guard against idleness, drink, pleasure, irreligion, why not against the forces which attack his one asset in life? He should learn enough about sanitation to prevent disease, about consumption to avoid taking it from a relative or a neighbor. There are millions yet who do not know that consumption is contagious and who associate intimately with its victims. And other millions who know nothing of the danger in unventilated rooms, in poor food, even if plentiful, in the exhaustion produced by constant overwork. And other millions who see no threat in child labor, in long hours and dangerous employments for women and children, and in other abuses of the industrial system.

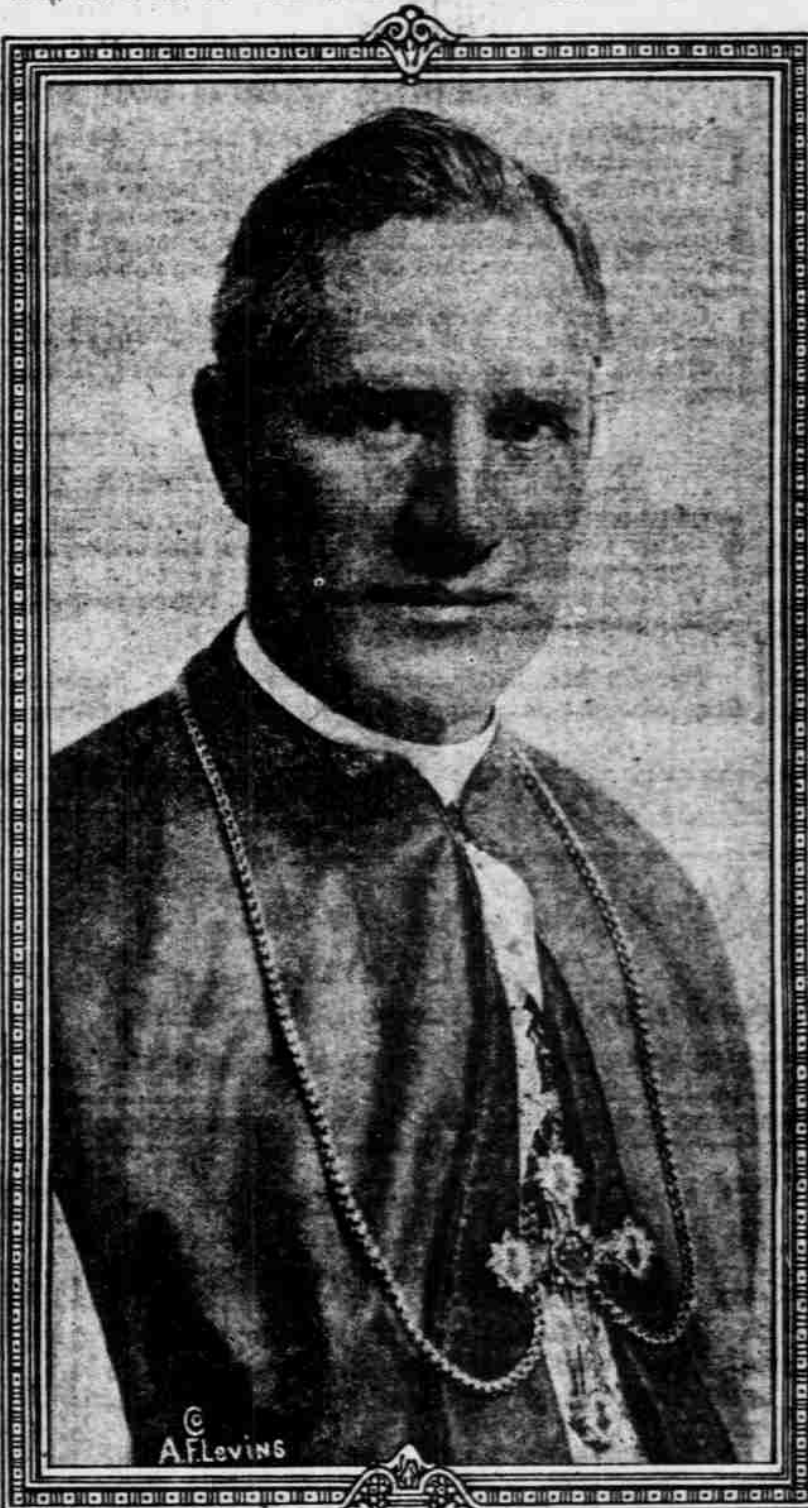
Even the children of the wealthier classes need instruction in many hygienic matters, with particular attention to their affluence. High society overworks, overfeeds, overdances, in all its functions. The children of the comfortable need to be put on their guard against the temptations to destroy that health without which wealth is almost nothing, education and culture nothing and life a deadly burden. Educators are well aware that a goodly part of what the school teaches permeates the home and at a later date the multitude. The use of water and soap and the bathtub and the disinfectant has grown among the Americans to proportions. Sanitation is almost a craze with us. The feeling against alcoholic drinks has assumed the form of a political movement. Not the shadow of a doubt that hygienic teaching in the schools helped in these matters. The generation brought up in the anti-alcohol schools now has the stage. If so much good has been accomplished in pioneer conditions, what cannot be done when experience has cleared the way? What an appeal the Catholic system can make to its pupils on the score of preparedness for life on earth as for life in heaven! The poor are lavish with their little, too lavish. With what care will a generation trained to appreciate the two assets, healthy body and healthy soul, conserve them by the avoidance of the things that harm and the observance of the things that count. How striking the analogy between the two, how impressive and how fruitful. When a man is so intelligently trained that he can see the enemies of the body and the enemies of the soul, namely, disease and sin, in practically the same light and knows the tactics against them, his career is assured.

The opponents of the teaching of hygiene in the schools found a new argument in the recent craze over the attempt to introduce sex hygiene. Perhaps a word on this matter will not be amiss to conclude this discussion. Catholics often forget that their viewpoint is different and that the circumstances which beget the viewpoint are also different in their case. The effort to teach sex hygiene sprang from conditions with which Catholic society is not familiar. Parents and teachers and interested citizens in America awoke suddenly to the fact that chastity is not a virtue of the irreligious; that consequently impurity is both a jest

and a practice among some millions of Americans, and that the children were learning too much about sex from private conversation and from the public press. Men like the Socialist Edward Carpenter had already complained that children were left to learn the sexual side of their nature from the creatures of the gutter and the sewer instead of learning it properly from parent or teacher or wise friend. It is a perfectly just and proper complaint. The Christian world in our day is manifestly guilty. The Christian world of an earlier time was more intelligent, less prudish and hidebound on sexual matters. Having considered all these things, the people most concerned did what every American does with a new theory, attached it to the school system. And then the war began. It is ancient history now, but undoubtedly it will reappear. The children are to-day exposed outrageously to contamination by the press, in street and office chatter, from high and low, from kinsfolk and neighbors, so that it is often asserted that the children know more about sex than their parents did at twenty.

It is a parental duty to instruct them, but is not the whole system

of public education, civil and ecclesiastical, founded on the presumption that the parents will not instruct? Not from lack of will, but from other lacks, quite as effective? And if the child needs instruction, and no one will give it, must not State or church or philanthropist do so? Here is evidently a dilemma. It is unnecessary to settle it, since this is a matter which time and thought and knowledge alone can settle. I merely present the facts. The millions without religion find the sexual problem insistently before them, and know not what to do. The religious section of the community have commanded silence in the school, but they cannot insure the silence of a lubricious press, of a sensual population whispering and singing in praise of Venus everywhere, so that the children must hear; and then you have the figures of the medical societies on the spread of alarming diseases! Poor human nature, as the Italians say. From all points of view it looks as if in the school of the future two studies will take the right prominence: religion and hygiene, perfect health of body and soul, to insure a strong, useful life and a happy eternity.



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